

NOV 11 1963

Sanitized - Approved For Release : CIA-RDP

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SUNDAY 000,405

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Edith K. Roosevelt Why Is U.S. Harassing 'Invaders'?

Miami customs agents have confiscated at gunpoint a World War II plane belonging to two Americans who fly leaflet raids over Cuba.

The plane, an unarmed Bearcat F8F, belongs to pilot William Johnson of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and New York TV reporter Alex Rorke Jr.

"Don't talk philosophy to me," customs agent Wallace Shanley was quoted as saying after the pair protested that Shanley did not have a court order for the federal government's seizure of their plane on Oct. 26.

Customs authorities said they were seizing the plane on suspicion of illegal export. Rorke and Johnson are now trying to recover their plane through the courts. They list this "illegal and arbitrary seizure" as one of many harassments they have suffered from the administration as members of the U.S. Freedom Fighters, a group dedicated to liberating Cuba by arms and free lance raids.

There may be a reason why the Freedom Fighters are a special irritant to those in power—the foundation officials and professors of our no-win scheme in a government. Included among the Freedom Fighters are a group of Cubans who were dispatched by a person or persons high in the Kennedy Administration on a futile suicide mission during the aborted Cuban invasion attempt last spring. Their story, which indignant U.S. Freedom Fighters are publicizing in talks to different groups, is as follows:

Before the Cuban invasion the Central Intelligence Agency rounded up an elite of 158 young American-educated Cubans whose background and education qualified them as potential leaders of a free Cuba. They included such men as Rod Portuondo, a graduate of Exeter and Princeton University who is now an executive

with J. Walter Thompson in Panama; Oscar Mestre of Miami, a graduate of Choate and Yale whose family owned CMQ, the biggest TV network in Cuba, and Ninco, the daring guerrilla command who fought Batista and then Castro, escaping from a Castro jail to resume the fight for Cuban freedom.

On April 11, 1962, the CIA put these men out to sea from Key West, Fla., in an 8-knot Liberty ship, the Santa Ana. The Cubans were told they would be met by the underground chief, Tico Herrera, and his men at the mouth of the Mocambo River in southern Oriente province, a few miles east of Guantanamo. But two days earlier Herrera and six of his men were incapacitated from injuries received when some dynamite caps exploded at Guantanamo naval base where they were being briefed for coordinated action. Surely, this incident must have been known to the high State Department officials and others involved in planning the Cuban operation.

Thus, on April 15, when the plucky band of Cubans arrived at the mouth of the Mocambo there were no underground fighters ashore to greet them and guide them to safety. Fortunately, their advance patrol boat struck a reef which had not been charted on the map furnished them by CIA. The delay enabled them to discover before landing that some 1,000 Castro troops were "by coincidence" waiting for them on the beach.

Orders from the White House halted action by 3,500 combat-ready Marines stationed at Vieques, 15,000 Marine and Army troops who were to land on the northern coast of the peninsula, the Marine forces at Guantanamo who were to take Santiago, the second largest city in Cuba, and 85 U.S. naval ships.

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